

## Cross-cultural Dimensions of Plagiarism

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## What Is Plagiarism?

Comes from Greek –  
“stealing someone’s child”

Today – use of someone  
else’s words or ideas  
without giving credit



## Two Kinds of Plagiarism

### Deliberate Plagiarism

- ▶ Downloading from the Internet
- ▶ “Borrowing” from a friend
- ▶ Student knows he/she is cheating

### Accidental Plagiarism

- ▶ Insufficient citation
- ▶ Cut-and-paste from websites
- ▶ Student does not intend to cheat

## Two Key Theorists

### Geert Hofstede

- ▶ High vs. Low Power Distance
- ▶ Individualism vs. Collectivism

### Alfons Trompenaars

- ▶ Universalism vs. Particularism

## High vs. Low Power Distance

= Acceptance of (in)equality in a culture



## High PD Cultures

- ▶ Strong sense of hierarchy
- ▶ Limited upward mobility
- ▶ Respect for authority – instructors, parents, bosses, etc.
- ▶ Examples: Middle East, Latin America, East and Southeast Asia, parts of Southern Europe

## Low PD Cultures

- ▶ Much smaller social gap
- ▶ Upward mobility more possible
- ▶ Respect not automatic – must be earned
  
- ▶ **Examples: Northern Europe, USA, Canada, UK, Ireland, Australia, NZ**

## Connection to Plagiarism

### In High PD cultures:

- ▶ Teachers, textbooks = sources of wisdom, must be respected, not responded to
  
- ▶ Copying large amounts of text from a recognised source = good scholarship
  
- ▶ Criticism of recognized authority = “at best an impertinence, at worst the secular equivalent of blasphemy” (Croxford, 2001)

## Individualism vs. Collectivism

= Focus on individual or on group?



## Individualist Cultures

- ▶ Self more important than group
- ▶ Members look out for self
- ▶ Looser interpersonal relationships
  
- ▶ **Examples: USA, Canada, UK, Northern Europe, Australia, NZ**

## Collectivist Cultures

- ▶ Group more important than self
- ▶ Members take responsibility for others
- ▶ Cohesive, conformist
  
- ▶ **Examples: Most cultures of the Middle East, Asia, and Latin America**

## Connection to Plagiarism

### In Individualist cultures:

- ▶ Ideas and information = seen as possessions; must not be used or borrowed by others

### In Collectivist cultures:

- ▶ Ideas and information = belong to society as a whole; accepted wisdom takes precedence over individual thought

## The Socratic Approach

- › Basis of western educational system
- › Truth from discussion, exchange of ideas
- › Centrality of individual; personal opinions valued
- › Two-way communication between teacher and student
- › Teacher = facilitator

## The Confucianist Approach

- › Basis of Asian educational system
- › Truth passed down from teachers to learners
- › Emphasizes accepted wisdom
- › Students in no position to critique or express individual ideas
- › Teacher = source of all knowledge; has “correct” answer

## Universalism vs. Particularism

= Rules, or relationships?



## Universalist Cultures

- › “What is good and right can be defined and always applies” (Tromenaars, 1993)
- › Clear distinction between right and wrong
- › Little consideration of indiv. circumstances
- › Emphasis on rules and written policy
- › Standardization = fairness
- › **Examples: Canada, USA, UK, Australia, Switzerland, Germany, Scandinavia**

## Particularist Cultures

- › Right and wrong connected to the situation
- › Loyalty more important than written policy
- › Helping friends may be justifiable
- › **Examples: China, Japan, Korea, Russia, the Middle East, Latin America, Indonesia, Thailand**

## Connection to Plagiarism

### In Universalist cultures:

- › Academic dishonesty is **WRONG**
- › Not tolerated under any circumstances

### In Particularist cultures:

- › More leeway in interpretation of acceptable behaviour
- › Canadian “cheating” = particularist “helping”

## In short...

Canadian post-secondary education requires behaviour that in other cultures might show

- lack of respect
  - lack of scholarship
  - lack of loyalty
- ▶ Often there is no intention of dishonesty; students are following conventions of their own culture

## One Perspective on Plagiarism

Western concept of plagiarism is:

- ▶ “a very particular cultural and ideological concern” (Pennycook, 1993)
- ▶ “a gatekeeping device” (Prochaska, 2001) that excludes non-western writers from academe

Do we need an ideology that accepts non-western writing conventions?

## On the Other Hand...

Holliday (1994) – we work within an expanding paradigm of host cultures

- ▶ Individual class = part of *host institution*
- ▶ Host institution = part of *host academic environment*; takes plagiarism very seriously

We have a responsibility to educate international students about plagiarism

## How?

- ▶ University teacher as ethnographer: be aware of cultural norms outside Canada
- ▶ Be clear about expectations regarding collaboration, citation, etc.
- ▶ Show sensitivity: This is how we do it *in this culture*; not this is *right*

## For More Information...

- ▶ Hofstede, G. & Hofstede, G.J. (2005). *Cultures and organizations: Software of the mind*. (Rev. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.
- ▶ Holliday, A. (1994). *Appropriate methodology and social context*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- ▶ Trompenaars, F. (1993). *Riding the waves of culture: Understanding diversity in global business*. Burr Ridge, ILL: Irwin Professional Publishing.

Thank you!

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